

THE RANGE RIDERS

BY C. SELTZER AUTHOR OF THE TWO-GUN MAN.

A Western Romance of the Great Outdoors—Cowboys, "Rustlers," Two-Gun Men and Frontier Heroines.



"HE'S PLAYING WITH A RATTLE!"

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CHAPTER I.
(Continued.)
The Double Cross.

He held his position at the fence. It was strategic and convenient. He merely nodded at McVea and the range boss as they pulled up their ponies and dismounted within twenty feet of him. He knew why McVea had come. McVea's first visit to a nester was always indicative of dire tragedy to follow. There had never been an exception.

"Reckon on proving this claim," asked McVea by way of getting down to business. "Proved?" McVea laughed satirically. "I reckon you don't prove nothing around these parts without witnesses." Monty smiled, but from his waistband came his six-shooter, and he leveled it in the general direction of McVea and the range boss.

"It's the same old game," he said quietly, but his tone conjured up thoughts of death and violence. "If the game you've worked on every man that's tried to prove a claim in these parts. Sometimes it's worked because the men got scared out quick. Sometimes when it didn't work you tried other things. But you've struck something different. I ain't a bit scared of you."

He smiled with level eyes at McVea. "You got that down?" he said coldly. "I ain't a bit scared. And I'm going to stay right here!" There was no bluster in his manner; only the calm positiveness of the man who knows what the next step will bring.

McVea thought to parley. "It's that the way you feel about it?" "You couldn't buy nothing that belongs to me," interrupted Monty, "not even that old skate of a pack horse."

"But—" "That's the final word, I reckon," resumed Monty. "I don't care to waste any more time gasin' with you. And I don't remember that I added you to come over here to talk to me about anything."

McVea crimsoned. "I'll visit you again," he threatened. A flash shot from Monty's pistol; smoke curled from the muzzle. McVea's hat lifted and settled down again. Near his crown a ragged hole showed where Monty's bullet had traveled.

"I reckon you heard me say something about wastin' time with you," he drawled. "As for you visitin' me again?" "You come near me," he warned.

He was still standing at the fence when the range boss and McVea reached Shallow Bend crossing on their way to Bar Cross ranch, but he was looking at them from behind the muzzle of his six-shooter.

It was too good to keep. The range boss chuckled to himself at the campfire, arousing thereby the curiosity of the boys.

"McVea done rode over to Shallow Bend to scare Monty," he said to the eager-eyed group around him. "Yes," they chorused.

"But Monty didn't scare," returned the range boss. "Didn't feaze him at all. An' I reckon you all never seen slicker shootin'."

"Monty is plum quick!" agreed the admiring listeners. "Yes," the range boss drawled. "I told me later that it wasn't Monty's bullet that lifted his hat—it was his hair. He was that shocked."

"Mac won't let up on him, though," said a tall puncher who had been long at Bar Cross. "Mac ain't the kind to let a nester get the best of him."

"I'm lookin' for unusual doings," commented the wagon boss. "We're all over that Monty ain't no spring chicken. That time he shot Hank Williams over on—"

"There's more than cattle stealin' in this case," said the horse wrangler. "I reckon the range boss saw the situation to the unfriendliness of any puncher to become his son-in-law. Sympathy for Monty was bound to show."

"I reckon one man is as good as another in these parts," said a tall puncher presently. Heads in the shadows bobbed affirmatively.

"I'm banking on Monty to win hands down," commented the wagon boss. In the darkness the range boss saw the significant grin that swept around the droop. Then his own face was turned toward the distance and the silence.

Monty thrived amazingly. His small herd grew to hundreds, and his hundreds roamed the range unmolested. Early in his new venture he adopted a branch of the Double Cross. The adoption of this brand provoked the members of the Bar Cross to grim humor and sent McVea into transports of bitter anger.

The manager looked upon Monty's use of this brand as an act of defiance, and though he made no direct charge, the men of the outfit began to understand that McVea suspected Monty of planning to appropriate Bar Cross stock as opportunity offered. Vigilance alone would prevent the merging of the Bar Cross brand into that of the Double Cross.

The merging of the two brands was a simple problem in geography. The Bar Cross sign, applied with a red hot iron to McVea's cattle, read thus, "—", which might readily be transformed into the Double Cross by the addition of a vertical bar. Viewed from a mechanical standpoint the operation was so trifling that detection would be practically impossible. And so each addition to Monty's herd was viewed with suspicion by McVea, for there was always the thought that under the sign of the Double Cross many of the Bar Cross cattle were masquerading.

But, of course, suspicious availed nothing. To all appearances Monty walked the straight and narrow path, neither meddling with the Bar Cross cattle nor encroaching his presence upon McVea. His meetings with the manager were marvels of frigidity.

Not so did Monty meet the boys of Bar Cross. Between him and the boys much thought had existed the most cordial relations, and something more than mere rivalry was needed to disturb them. This thing McVea saw—and headed. His knowledge came through a conversation with the range boss, which had occurred one day when McVea had felt particularly worried over the situation.

"Monty's been nester on this range for a while year," said McVea. There was resentment in his voice. The range boss nodded languidly. "We've had nesters in these parts before," he returned.

"Sure," said McVea, astonished that the range boss should ask confirmation on this score. "And the boys have always helped you to show them that this country didn't need them."

"Sure. What you driving at?" "I reckon you're going to play a lone hand in drivin' Monty out. The boys are with him."

McVea had suspected this, but had not dared to speak it. Now his long subdued anger surged forth spitefully. "I'll fire every one of them," he began. But he broke off abruptly when the range boss smiled dryly. "I wouldn't say that very loud," he admonished quietly. "You see, Monty's pretty well established. He's got a corral that's plenty big enough, he's got some buildings and he's got some steers. I'm aggerin' that he'll get



"FOR AN INSTANT THEY STOOD THERE, THEIR EYES SOFTENING."

his pony, mentally measuring the size of the Double Cross brand. Then, smiling placidly, he continued on his way.

That night the manager slept the first sound sleep he had known for many nights, but in his dreams there occurred a curious confusion of cow-boys and boys as he might be could not prevent the Bar Cross brand from merging mysteriously into that of the Double Cross.

The day following McVea's trip to Shallow Bend he sent the blacksmith with the wagon. During the latter's absence the manager spent the greater part of the day in the shop busy at some mysterious labor. The next morning the boys drove in a bunch of yearlings for branding. After they were corralled McVea drew the range boss to the fence.

"We've got some fine yearlings this season," he remarked, casually. "I reckon they're as good as the next man's," returned the range boss.

"Clean-cut bunch," observed McVea; "and they ain't marked none to speak of."

"Except that short horn over near the gate," said the range boss. He indicated a steer with a rich, red-brown coat, broken by a patch of dead white hair near the right shoulder.

McVea nodded assent, smiling with gratified eyes. "There ain't another steer like that in the corral," he said. "I reckon that one is a freak. You're branding them to-morrow," he added.

"Sure," returned the range boss. He looked quickly at McVea, surprised that he should ask the question. It is not good business to confine cattle to the corral for more than two consecutive days.

The next morning the Bar Cross outfit awaited amidst the reek and dust of the corral. An hour after noon Miss McVea rode down to look on for a moment before starting on her daily ride. A steer with a rich, reddish-brown coat and a dead white patch near the shoulder was down and a puncher was applying the red-hot iron of the Bar Cross brand.

"An odd mark," commented Miss McVea in the presence of the range boss. "Just what the Old Man—the Boss—said yesterday," returned the range boss blushing. "That's the one."

Then Miss McVea rode on, the range boss looking after her and smiling his worshipful admiration.

(To Be Continued.)

The New Plays
"The Bird of Paradise"
Is Worth Seeing
BY CHARLES DARNTON.

WITH the steam-pipes thumping away in the wilds of Hawaii at the beginning and the tropical heroine throwing herself into a scorching crater at the end, any one with a little imagination can manage to keep warm at Daly's these cold nights.

There is so much warmth in Oliver Morosoff's production of "The Bird of Paradise" that even the bare-legged Kanakas seem as comfortable as though they were strolling about a Turkish bath. Richard W. Tully's play exerts a full, exotic charm. Like "The Rose of the Rancho," by the same author, it is full of color. At times the lighting makes the color seem glaring, yet there is always the effect of novelty. Compared with "The Garden of Allah" and "Kismet," however, this production seems somewhat crude. It lacks the one final touch that gives a stage picture real beauty.

If "The Bird of Paradise" had not arrived at a time when the town is almost color-blind it would no doubt be hailed with delight. And even with the odds against it there is every chance of its enjoying a long night in more distant regions. If not here, for it undoubtedly possesses those qualities that go to make up a popular success. It is worth seeing and fairly interesting to hear.

The story, like the native music that is played and sung, has a plaintive note. This note is struck with a fine sense of tone by Miss Laurette Taylor as Luana, the native princess who believes in the power of her arms and her lips and soon convinces Paul Wilson, a more or less scientific American, that he will be much happier with her than he would be with a colony of lepers.

In her simple way she turns him to a life of love and drink—and under the circumstances this doesn't seem such a hard life! Wilson falls an easy victim, despite the horrible example offered him by a beachcomber known as "Ten-Thousand-Dollar" Dean, who hasn't drawn a sober breath for two years.

One kiss from Luana changes everything. The warm climate, I suppose, has something to do with it. Anyway, Wilson forgets all about his promise to marry Diana Larned, who is too good to be selfish, and the next thing you know the Princess Luana is plain Mrs. Wilson. With rare devotion she makes life very easy for him. All he has to do is drink and sleep. Sometimes he speaks of home, but he is compelled to admit that home was never like this.

And Luana is very happy until Diana wears slippers that hurt her feet and Wilson is drunk and dressed up, and so thoroughly that he leaves Luana then and there without even saying goodbye.

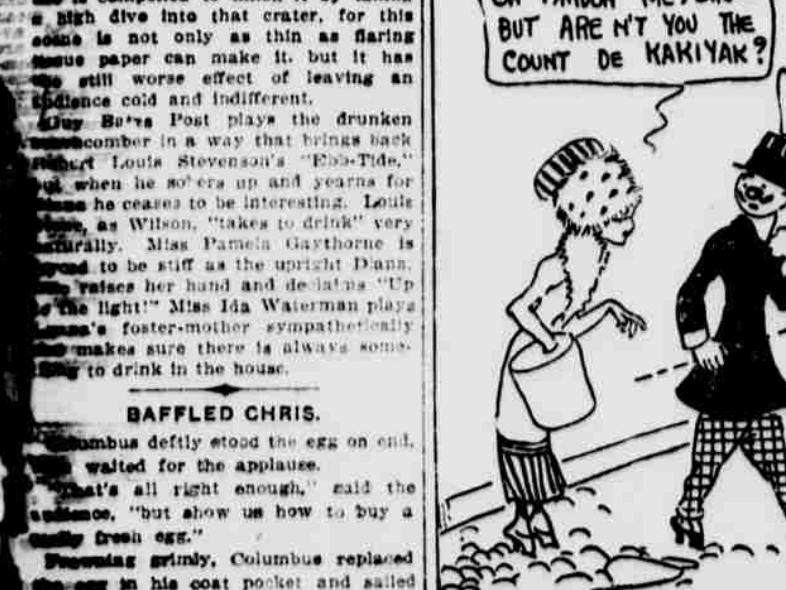
In passing through these experiences Miss Taylor is delightfully naïve. She is so simple and direct that both tender and humor are often suggested in the same moment. Occasionally she gives her effects at the cost of cutting her words so short that only a very quick ear can catch what she is saying, but her work on the whole is by far the best she has ever done. It is a pity that she is compelled to finish it by taking a high dive into that crater, for this scene is not only as thin as flaring cellophane paper can make it, but it has the still worse effect of leaving an audience cold and indifferent.

Oliver Morosoff plays the drunken beachcomber in a way that brings back to mind Louis Stevenson's "Red-Tide," and when he roars up and yells for Luana he seems to be interesting. Louis Lumsden, as Wilson, "takes to drink" very naturally. Miss Pamela Garthorne is bound to be stiff as the upright Diana, and Miss Ida Waterman plays Luana's foster-mother sympathetically and makes sure there is always something to drink in the house.

BAFFLED CHRIS.
Columbus deftly stood the egg on end, and waited for the applause. "That's all right enough," said the audience, "but show us how to buy a really fresh egg."

Stooping grimly, Columbus replaced the egg in his coat pocket and sailed for America.—Life.

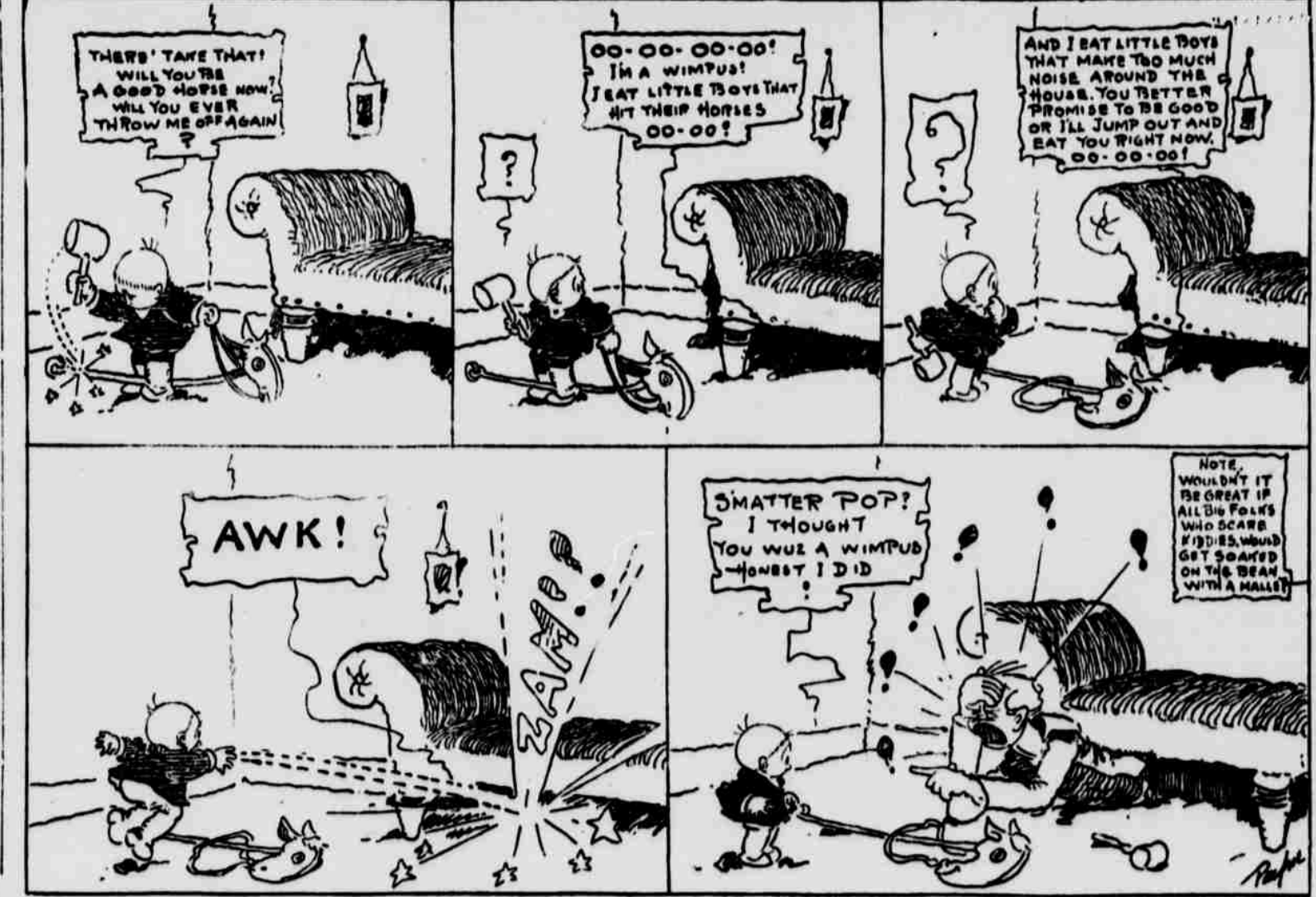
LEAP YEAR LIZZIE (Ain't She Bizzy?)



MY! I'VE JUST BEEN LOOKING EVERYWHERE FOR YOU—I WANT TO PRESENT MY ART GALLERIES TO THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT—

S'Matter, Pop?

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LEAP YEAR LIZZIE (Ain't She Bizzy?)

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LEAP YEAR LIZZIE (Ain't She Bizzy?)

Betty Vincent's Advice to Lovers

"My Parents Object."

"I AM in love, but my parents object to the girl" (or the man). "What shall I do?"

Somewhere writes to ask me that nearly every day I only know one answer that is applicable to all cases—wait till you both are twenty-one and then decide for yourselves.

In many, if not in all States, marriages where one or both the contracting parties can be proved under age are illegal unless the parents' consent has been obtained.

In any event, you owe it to your father and mother not to go against their wishes in anything so serious as marriage until you are grown-up.

When that time arrives, however, you ought to be capable of making the important choice for yourself.

A Fratern' Fin.
"M. W." writes: "My friends say that I ought not to wear a man's fraternity pin unless I am engaged to him. Is that right?"

Yes. A man is not supposed to let any one wear his frat pin except the girl he intends to marry.

"S. G." writes: "A young man has been payin' me attentions, but we are not engaged. Is it right for me to dine with his parents, if they ask me?" Certainly.

"O. E." writes: "Is it proper for me to go out with a friend in the navy when he is in uniform?" I see no reason why you shouldn't.

"L. S." writes: "If a man invites a girl to go to a dance should he meet her at the hall or should he go to her home and fetch her?" The latter custom is the usual one.

The Girl Friend.
"A. F." writes: "I love a young lady and she says she returns my affection. But everything I tell her she tells to another girl. How can I stop it?" Tell the young lady frankly that she must respect your confidences.

"A. E." writes: "I loaned a valuable ring to a young man who said he considered attention. He went out of town on a business trip and I haven't heard from him for six months. How shall I get my ring back?" If you know the young man's address write and ask him for it. But let this be a lesson not to lend jewelry to men acquaintances.

"M. T." writes: "One young man sent me a lovely Christmas present. Another called on me last night and said he wouldn't speak to me if I had anything more to do with the first young man. Which cares for me most?" The young man who gives, not the one who exacts.

"L. G." writes: "A rich physician wants to marry me, but the man I love earns \$15 a week. Now which shall I choose? I like the physician, but don't love him."

Marry the man you do love. There is absolutely no other basis for a happy marriage.

A girl who signs herself "B. R." writes: "A month ago my fiance treated me very rudely and would not speak. I have written him since, but he has not replied to the letter. Yet I think he still cares for me, since I trouble him to see me with any one else. How can I win him back?"

You have already made an overture to which he has not yet responded. I think you owe it to your self-respect to let him take the next step.